



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice China

China – CHN36883 – Hebei – Christians –
House churches
23 June 2010

1. Please provide maps and information on the location of the Beiwang village, Nanmeng Town, Gaocheng City in Hebei province, and also Wangjia village.

Google maps showing the location of Beiwang village, Nanmeng Town and Gaocheng City are provided as attachments.¹ Beiwang village is located on the S302 Provincial Highway, approximately six kilometres south of Nanmeng Town and approximately 20 kilometres north of Gaocheng City.

Google maps provide the locations of two Wangjia villages (王家村). These are both located approximately 70 kilometres from Beiwang village. A map showing the location of the two villages, south and west of Beiwang village is provided as an attachment.²

2. Please provide information on the current treatment by authorities of house church members in Hebei province.

Some house church members in Hebei province currently experience ill-treatment from government officials in the form of administrative detention, arrest, and re-education in labour camps. Missionary activity by independent church members was the target of police action in one location in Hebei (Baoding City) in 2003. While it is unknown whether similar forms of treatment against house church members are common across Hebei, in general, officials in this province are reported to strictly enforce the Communist government's religious policy that the practice of Christianity be limited to officially registered church associations.³

In January 2010, 30 house church leaders in Handan city in southern Hebei (approximately 200 kilometres south of Gaocheng City) were detained during a Bible study meeting. The members were accused of participating in an illegal meeting. Three were sentenced to administrative detention for periods of between 10 and 15 days. The remaining leaders were either released or their treatment by officials is unknown.⁴ The detentions were reported by Reverend Zhang Mingxuan, pastor and president of the Chinese Home Church Alliance (CHCA),⁵ a body established to defend the specific rights of house church Christians.⁶

¹ 'Beiwang village and Nanmeng Town' 2010, Google Maps – Attachment 1; 'Gaocheng City and Nanmeng Town' 2010, Google Maps – Attachment 2.

² 'Approximate locations of two Wangjia villages and Beiwang village' 2010, Google Maps – Attachment 3.

³ Lambert, T. 2006, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, p.247 – Attachment 4; Kawn, D. 2003, 'Crackdown ordered on unofficial churches', *South China Morning Post*, 4 February – Attachment 5; Johnstone, Patrick *et al* 2001, *Operation World: 21st Century Edition*, WEC International, p.172 – Attachment 6.

⁴ China Aid Association 2010, '30 Chinese House Church Alliance Leaders Detained, Facing Administrative Detention', 9 January

http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=1372&nc=109f3b061925cc9f78d9c01e7f6f88f8 - Accessed 22 June 2010 – Attachment 7.

⁵ Yu, V. 2010, 'Christians' detention sparks concern', *South China Morning Post*, 11 January – Attachment 8; 'Fate of Church Members Unknown' 2010, *Radio Free Europe Documents and Publications*, 11 January – Attachment 9.

⁶ 'Authorities banish Pastor from Beijing prior to Games', 2008 Compass Direct, 5 August – Attachment 10.

The China Aid Association reported on the arrest of 43 house church members between January 2007 and December 2009 in three cities (Hengshui, Baoding, Zhouzhou) in Hebei. These individuals were involved in house church meetings, and Bible and marriage classes.⁷ Treatment of these individuals after arrest is not known. Nine Protestant leaders from the province were also detained in July 2007 after conducting a Sunday worship service together at a home. Administrative courts in Enshizhou, in Hebei, found the Christians guilty of “engaging in organizing and making use of [an] evil cult organization to undermine the enforcement of State laws”. Those sentenced were later placed in forced labour camps.⁸

In addition to targeting house church members, authorities in Hebei also target those undertaking missionary activities. In 2003, an internal document reportedly issued by the Public Security Bureau in Baoding city ordered that police take action to stop illegal Protestant groups in the area, including those working as “independent missionaries” who attempt to evangelise. No reports were found on the results of this police action in Baoding. An article from the *South China Morning Post* reported on these events as follows:

Activists say that police in Hebei were ordered to spy on worshippers and to isolate rogue Christian groups. Police were ordered to isolate unofficial Christian groups in Baoding city, Hebei province, and spy on people worshipping at their churches, a group of religious activists has claimed.

Quoting a classified document issued by the Public Security Bureau in Baoding city in August, the New York-based Committee for Investigation on Persecution of Religion in China said police had been instructed to separate activities by the officially-sanctioned Protestant Church and other groups....

The document – entitled “Work Plan on Terminating Illegal Christian Activities” – recommended all officers in Baoding city to heighten their vigilance against “illegal Christians” between August and October last year.

The crackdown coincided with the lead-up to the 16th Communist Party Congress, a key event in the political calendar. However, in addition to a specific action plan for the three-month period, the document also laid down general guidelines that could signal a hardening of the government’s position towards Protestant groups deemed a threat to the authorities.

During the crackdown, the city’s police chief, Li Yunlong, headed a taskforce in charge of “finding out everything about illegal Christians, bringing organisers of illegal activities and independent missionaries to justice, and shutting down venues used by the illegal Christians”.

The term “independent missionaries” apparently refers to evangelists who work independently from any churches. “(We) must strive to effectively halt the emergence of illegal activities by Protestants in our city,” the document said. Unlike previous government edicts, the latest one singled out Protestant groups as targets for

⁷ China Aid Association 2010, *Annual Report of Persecution by the Government on Christian House Churches within Mainland China January 2009—December 2009*, 31 January, p.17 – Attachment 11; China Aid Association 2009, *Annual Report of Persecution by Government on Christian House Churches within Mainland China: January 2008 – December 2008* (The Year of the Beijing Olympic Games, January, pp.7-8 – Attachment 12; China Aid Association 2008, *Annual Report of Persecution by the Government on Chinese House Churches within Mainland China: January 2007 to December 2007*, February, p.13 – Attachment 13.

⁸ ‘Missing since June, nine protestant leaders “re-appear” in labour camps’ 2007, *Asia News IT*, 8 October – Attachment 14.

control and demanded police officers include the crackdown on “illegal Christians” as part of their daily work.⁹

House Churches

House churches are broadly defined as small Protestant Christian communities or groups who meet informally in homes without government approval. Often described as evangelical, house church member services are simple and do not adhere to any particular Christian tradition or denomination.¹⁰ No figures on the numbers of house churches in Hebei were found. Total Protestant numbers (official and unofficial) in the province were estimated to be approximately 400,000 in 2001.¹¹

Attachments

1. ‘Beiwang village and Nanmeng Town’ 2010, Google Maps.
2. ‘Gaocheng City and Nanmemg Town’ 2010, Google Maps.
3. ‘Approximate locations of two Wangjia villages and Beiwang village’ 2010, Google Maps.
4. Lambert, T. 2006, *China’s Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford.
5. Kawn, D. 2003, ‘Crackdown ordered on unofficial churches’, *South China Morning Post*, 4 February. (FACTIVA)
6. Johnstone, Patrick *et al* 2001, *Operation World: 21st Century Edition*, WEC International, p.172.
7. China Aid Association 2010, ‘30 Chinese House Church Alliance Leaders Detained, Facing Administrative Detention’, 9 January
http://www.chinaaid.org/qry/page.taf?id=105&_function=detail&sbtblct_uid1=1372&_nc=109f3b061925cc9f78d9c01e7f6f88f8 – Accessed 22 June 2010.
8. Yu, V. 2010, ‘Christians’ detention sparks concern’, *South China Morning Post*, 11 January. (FACTIVA)
9. ‘Fate of Church Members Unknown’ 2010, *Radio Free Europe Documents and Publications*, 11 January. (FACTIVA)
10. ‘Authorities banish Pastor from Beijing prior to Games’, 2008 *Compass Direct*, 5 August. (CISNET CHINA – CX20709).
11. China Aid Association 2010, *Annual Report of Persecution by the Government on Christian House Churches within Mainland China January 2009—December 2009*, 31 January.

⁹ Kawn, D. 2003, ‘Crackdown ordered on unofficial churches’, *South China Morning Post*, 4 February – Attachment 5.

¹⁰ Lambert, T. 2006, *China’s Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, pp.55–59 – Attachment 4; DIMA Country Information and Protection Support Section 2006, *House Churches in China*, Issues Brief CHN290306, 29 March, pp.5-6 – Attachment 15..

¹¹ Lambert, T. 2006, *China’s Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, Oxford, p.247 – Attachment 4.

12. China Aid Association 2009, *Annual Report of Persecution by Government on Christian House Churches within Mainland China: January 2008 – December 2008 (The Year of the Beijing Olympic Games*, January.
13. China Aid Association 2008, *Annual Report of Persecution by the Government on Chinese House Churches within Mainland China: January 2007 to December 2007*, February.
14. ‘Missing since June, nine protestant leaders “re-appear” in labour camps’ 2007, Asia News IT, 8 October. (CISNET CHINA CX186264)
15. DIMA Country Information and Protection Support Section 2006, *House Churches in China*, Issues Brief CHN290306, 29 March. (CISNET CHN 290306)